A

VINDICATION

OF THE

Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters,

With Regard to their late

APPLICATION to PARLIAMENT.

——ſpes ſibi quiſque, ſed, hæc quam auguſta, videtis.
VIRGIL.

By ANDREW KIPPIS, D. D.

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TO

His Grace the Duke of RICHMOND,

The Right Hon. the Earl of CHATHAM,

The Right Hon. the Earl of SHELBURNE,

AND

The Right Hon. the Lord LYTTELTON,

In grateful acknowlegement of the Reaſon, Eloquence, Learning, and Piety diſplayed by them in Support of the DISSENTERS BILL, the following Publication is humbly inſcribed, by

Their moſt obliged,

moſt obedient, and

moſt devoted Servant,

ANDREW KIPPIS.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THOUGH the author had the honour of being one of the Committee appointed for conducting the late Application to Parliament, this performance has not been drawn up under the ſanction of the Committee; and, to prevent their being, in the leaſt degree, anſwerable for its faults, it has not been communicated, previous to its publication, to a ſingle member of that body. If, therefore, in any inſtance, the writer has expreſſed himſelf improperly, or afforded juſt ground of offence, he hopes that nothing of this kind will be converted to the prejudice of a cauſe which he intends to ſerve. He takes the liberty of adding, that he thinks he hath a full right of vindicating his brethren who concur with him in ſentiment, upon ſuch principles as appear to him to be important, though they ſhould not be exactly the ſame principles on which other Diſſenting Miniſters may proceed, who are equally well-wiſhers to the deſign of removing the Subſcription required by the Toleration Act, and of obtaining Relief for Tutors and School-maſters.

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Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters.

THE queſtion concerning the right, expediency, and utility of requiring an aſſent or ſubſcription to human articles of religion hath, for near ſixty years, been the frequent matter of debate in this country. It was largely conſidered in the celebrated controverſy, occaſioned by biſhop Hoadly's ſermon on the kingdom of Chriſt; was vigorouſly taken up and purſued in the great difference which aroſe among the Diſſenters, in 1719, and hath often been revived in the diſputes between the nonconformiſts

and the clergy of the eſtabliſhed church. But it hath never perhaps been more clearly and copiouſly diſcuſſed, than from the publication of the Confeſſional to the preſent time. The ſubject ſeems, indeed, to be almoſt exhauſted in that maſterly and celebrated performance; ſo that many perſons may be diſpoſed to think, that nothing farther need be written or read upon the queſtion. It muſt, however, be acknowledged, that ſubſequent productions have been of no little ſervice. They have tended ſtill more to elucidate the matter, to ſpread the knowledge of it wider, and to expoſe the futility of all the arguments which have been urged for human teſts of faith and orthodoxy. Even the writings in favour of ſubſcription have, upon the whole, contributed to promote the contrary cauſe; for the authors of moſt of them have been ſo weak in their reaſonings, that, in fact, they have only afforded occaſion of greater triumph to their adverſaries.

It ſeems to have been amply ſhewn, in the courſe of the controverſy, that no Chri-

Chriſtian ſociety can have a right to impoſe articles of human compoſition on any of its members; becauſe a requiſition of this kind is contrary to the authority of our Saviour, as the lord and law-giver of his own church; and becauſe it is equally contrary to the principles upon which Proteſtantiſm can alone be defended, which are the liberty of private judgment, and the ſufficiency of Scripture. Could it even be proved, which it never can, that ſuch a power might be exerciſed without violating the precepts of the Goſpel, or ſubverting the grounds of the Reformation from Popery; ſtill the utility of ſubſcriptions hath juſtly been called in queſtion: nay, it hath been evinced, that they are hurtful in the higheſt degree; that they have been productive of endleſs debates, animoſities, and diviſions; have been one chief cauſe of the infidelity which prevails among the great, in almoſt every Chriſtian country; and, indeed, have occaſioned ſuch a multitude of evils and miſeries, as cannot be reflected upon without deeply regretting

that mankind have not long ago been ſenſible of their pernicious nature, tendency, and effects.

Independent of theſe conſiderations, relative to human impoſitions and teſts of orthodoxy in general, many of the eſtabliſhed clergy labour under difficulties, with regard to the Thirty-nine Articles in particular. While they continue obliged to ſubſcribe theſe articles, it muſt be impoſſible for them to vindicate the Chriſtian diſpenſation, or to conduct their religious enquiries with the freedom and advantage which are neceſſary to maintain and ſupport the cauſe of truth. When they engage with the enemies of revelation, they cannot defend the Goſpel on its proper footing, but are embarraſſed by doctrines which they may not believe to exiſt in the New Teſtament. This is certainly a great diſadvantage to them in their controverſies with infidels, who accordingly have gladly availed themſelves of it. Indeed, the grand triumph of infidelity appears to me to ariſe from charging certain abſurdities on the religion of

Jeſus,

Jeſus, which are by no means to be found there; but this the clergy cannot clearly and fully prove, ſo long as they are hampered with teſts of human compoſition.

The ſame cauſe muſt be no ſmall embarraſſment to them, in their diſputes with the Papiſts, and their defence of the Proteſtant Reformation. It is true, that ſeveral of the errors, impoſitions, and corruptions of Popery, are condemned in the Articles; but then the authority which ſupports theſe corruptions is too much favoured by the power arrogated to the church in the Twentieth Article. The pretenſion to ſuch a power, and the actual exerciſe of it, can never be maintained but upon principles ſubverſive of genuine Proteſtantiſm. Until, therefore, theſe principles be renounced, the miniſters of the eſtabliſhment will often appear weak and inconſiſtent adverſaries to the church of Rome.

Another difficulty, under which many of the clergy are laid by their ſubſcription to the Thirty-nine Articles, ariſes from the Calviniſtical part of the Methodiſts.

thodiſts. It is well known how much the Methodiſts of this kind triumph in the Articles, as being deciſive in their favour; and can it be truly ſaid, that they do not triumph with reaſon? I am not inſenſible what learned pains have been taken to give the Articles in queſtion a more liberal explication, ſo as to render them conſiſtent with the doctrines of Arminius; but, in ſuch a cauſe as this, the moſt able and celebrated writers muſt ever bow to a Toplady and a Bowman*. It ſeems to be an infatuation that hath ſeized numbers of the clergy, who are undoubtedly Arminians, in being ſo zealous for a ſubſcription to Articles, which cannot be reconciled with their own ſentiments. So long as this infatuation ſubſiſts, and ſubſcription, in its preſent form, maintains its ground, the Methodiſts muſt increaſe. Senſible of their advantage, they are of all men the moſt virulent enemies to the ſcheme of the peti-

* Two gentlemen who have lately written in defence of the Calviniſtical ſenſe of the Articles.

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tioning clergy, as may eſpecially be ſeen in the preface and notes to a late publication of Mr. Martin Madan's †.

As theſe, and all the other objections which may be made againſt ſubſcription to human teſts of religion in general, and to the Thirty-nine Articles in particular, have been ſo fully diſcuſſed in this inquiſitive age, and ſo often preſented to the conſideration of ingenuous and thoughtful minds, it cannot be deemed ſurpriſing that they have had ſome influence in changing the ſentiments of men; that the force of them hath been felt by many of the eſtabliſhed clergy themſelves, and that it continues to be felt more and more every day. There are numbers, no doubt, who ſigh for a reformation in ſecret, while others have, in various forms, publicly expreſſed their wiſhes on this head. A ſelect few have gone farther, and made an actual attempt, by petition to parliament, to obtain relief in the matter of ſubſcription. I ſhall not enter into the

† His Scriptural Comment on the Thirty-nine Articles.

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hiſtory of the conduct or the fate of the petition. It is well known, that the admiſſion of it was rejected by a large majority of the Houſe of Commons; nor will this appear extraordinary to thoſe who reflect upon the variety of circumſtances which concurred to prevent its obtaining a favourable reception.

The affair of ſubſcription to human doctrines, though ſo much agitated of late years, is far from being univerſally or thoroughly underſtood. This ſeems to be the caſe with regard to a conſiderable part of the clergy themſelves, who probably ſubmit to the terms of miniſterial conformity impoſed upon them, as a thing of courſe, without having entertained the leaſt doubt concerning the juſtice and wiſdom of demanding ſuch terms, or having made the leaſt enquiry into the competence of the authority by which they are preſcribed. Much leſs then can it be expected, that the laity in general ſhould have paid attention to matters of this nature. Engaged in their buſineſs, their pleaſures, their political

ſchemes

ſchemes and purſuits, the members of Parliament did moſt of them probably think that religious concerns ought to be left to thoſe who, by their profeſſion, are imagined to be beſt acquainted with them, and therefore the Houſe was diſpoſed to give no countenance to a deſign which was ſupported by ſo few of the clerical order. The ſmall number of the petitioners muſt certainly have been very prejudicial to their cauſe. This would have no little influence on the conduct of ſeveral of the clergy, who ſecretly wiſhed well to the ſcheme; would blaſt its reputation with thoſe who had a diſlike to it; and prevent the generality of the laity from treating it with any regard.

Its originating likewiſe with perſons of no great rank in the church muſt have been hurtful to it in the higheſt degree. In fact, it was ſo far from originating with, that it was oppoſed by the dignified clergy, and particularly by almoſt the whole bench of biſhops, who, by their character and ſtation, are expected

to take the lead in what immediately relates to eccleſiaſtical matters: nor were their lordſhips influenced ſolely by diſguſt at the petitioners' mode of proceeding, or by the general averſion they may be thought to have to ſchemes of reformation, as not knowing where ſuch ſchemes may end, but might imagine that too much was aſked; that the preciſe difficulties laboured under ought to have been ſtated; that the articles complained of ſhould have been ſpecified, and not the entire abolition of ſubſcription demanded. Subſcription to ſome teſt they might conſider as a fence abſolutely neceſſary to the exiſtence and ſecurity of religious eſtabliſhments, or ſo important, at leaſt, that it could not be wholly removed without danger.

But what had a great effect on many members of the legiſlative body was the particular idea they have formed concerning the nature of a national eſtabliſhment. The public mode of religion they do not conſider in a ſpiritual view, as what is ſolely to be directed by the laws

of

of Chriſt and of his Goſpel, but as a certain ſyſtem of doctrine and worſhip, which the ſtate hath adopted for its own purpoſes, and for the maintenance of which a number of perſons are paid by the government. It is the opinion, therefore, of political men, that the civil magiſtrate has a right of preſcribing what he pleaſes with regard to the form of religion embraced and countenanced by him; that thoſe who will not comply with the terms on which eccleſiaſtical preferments are propoſed, have no claim to them; and that ſuch perſons ſhould either readily perform the duty aſſigned them, or give up all title to the reward.

Other reaſons, no doubt, concurred to prevent the ſucceſs of the petitioning clergy: but theſe were probably the chief reaſons by which men of the world were determined, whatever effect ſpeculative and doctrinal opinions might have on the minds of individuals, and eſpecially of the clergy, whether in higher or lower ſtations.

Should it be aſked why theſe things are mentioned, or what connection they have with the ſubject before us; I anſwer, that it appears to me to be of importance to mention them, becauſe it is hence evident, that the motives for rejecting the petition of the clergy are not applicable to the ſituation of the Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters.

Without pretending to approve of the arguments which were ſo fatal to the petitioners, without wiſhing ill to their cauſe, many of us could not but be rejoiced to find that theſe arguments did not diſcourage an application to Parliament in our particular caſe. We were naturally led, both by our ſentiments and ſituation, to pay a very diligent attention to the controverſy between the diſſatisfied clergy and the advocates for ſubſcription, and to obſerve the progreſs and fate of the petitions offered to the legiſlature; and we ſaw with pleaſure, that the reaſons alledged for the continuance of ſubſcription were applicable only to thoſe who are members, and receive

receive the emoluments of a national eſtabliſhed church. We ſaw, with pleaſure, that none of theſe reaſons militated againſt the liberty which may be claimed, and ought to be granted, under a toleration. We ſaw, with pleaſure, that Mr. Toplady, one of the warmeſt defenders of the Thirty-nine Articles, had aſſerted, that the ſubſcription required of the Diſſenters is a real grievance, equally oppreſſive and abſurd. We ſaw, with ſtill greater pleaſure, that Dr. Tucker, the ableſt apologiſt for the church of England, had declared—" Let the miniſters of Diſſenting congregations, if they will chooſe to apply, be heartily wiſhed a good deliverance from the burden of our ſubſcriptions." But what gave us peculiar ſatisfaction was, that our caſe was not involved in the arguments urged againſt the petitioners in the Houſe of Commons, and that it was even ſpoken of in a manner, which might afford a rational proſpect of obtaining redreſs. By all theſe circumſtances we were encouraged to hope, that we ſhould ſucceed in an application-

plication to be relieved from the ſubſcription required by the Act of Toleration: nay, ſuch an application was highly expedient, becauſe the peculiarity of our ſituation became every day more and more notorious. It was declared in ſeveral publications, it was declared in the Houſe of Commons, that the greater part of the Diſſenting Miniſters had not ſubſcribed. It was known too, that a large number of us could not poſſibly ſubſcribe, and that we ſtood expoſed to very ſevere penalties for our refuſal. When, therefore, our danger was evidently increaſed, and there appeared, at the ſame time, a diſpoſition to relieve us, we ſhould have been ſhamefully deficient in the duty we owe to ourſelves, to our poſterity, and to the divine cauſe of religious liberty, if we had not endeavoured to obtain a legal toleration.

But though the circumſtances I have mentioned encouraged an application to Parliament at this time, and we might otherwiſe have been contented ſome years longer with a ſtate of connivance, let it not

not be imagined that we were inſenſible of the infelicity of our condition, or that we did not deſire and aim at procuring a deliverance from it. We were painfully conſcious of our diſgraceful ſituation: we lamented, that, as miniſters of the Goſpel, we were not under the protection of law, and could ſcarcely be conſidered as members of civil ſociety: we felt that, in our religious capacity, whatever injuſtice might be done to our perſons or characters, we were entirely deſtitute of the means of redreſs. Inſtances have occurred among us of men who have been obliged to deſiſt from a legal proſecution for the moſt atrocious injuries, becauſe they have not qualified, and could not qualify according to the terms of the Toleration Act. It has, therefore, been not only the wiſh, but the deſign of many Diſſenting Miniſters to embrace the firſt favourable opportunity of attempting to get a deliverance from the burden of ſubſcription. This hath long been my own caſe; and I know that it hath been the caſe with a number of the moſt reſpectable of my brethren. We have

often

often converſed upon the ſubject, and have often regretted, that when the Diſſenters formerly applied for the repeal of the Teſt Act, they did not direct their attention and zeal to what appears to us a vaſtly more deſirable and important object. The Teſt Act only excludes thoſe who cannot comply with it, from the enjoyment of certain civil honours and preferments: the Toleration Act, if we cannot ſubmit to its terms, legally deprives us of what we apprehend to be the common rights of human nature, and of Chriſtianity, and ſubjects us to very ſevere penalties. We muſt, therefore, have been deſtitute of all the principles and feelings of the mental frame, if we did not regard the amendment and enlargement of ſuch an act of parliament as a matter of unſpeakable moment.

In order to ſhew this more particularly, it may not be improper to look back a little, to the ſtate of things when the Toleration Act was obtained, and to the change which hath taken place in the ſentiments of many of the Diſſenters.

By

By the Toleration Act, Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters are exempted from the penal laws made againſt nonconformity, *only* on condition of their taking the oaths of allegiance and ſupremacy, making and ſubſcribing the declaration againſt Popery, and ſubſcribing alſo the Articles of the church of England, except the thirty-fourth, thirty-fifth, and thirty-ſixth, and part of the twentieth Article. Antipœdobaptiſts are farther excuſed from ſubſcribing that part of the twenty-ſeventh Article which relates to infant-baptiſm.

All Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters, therefore, who cannot ſubſcribe the doctrinal Articles of the church of England, are thereby excluded from the benefit of the Act of Toleration, and expoſed to the penalties of all the laws before in force againſt nonconforming miniſters. "They are not to come or be, unleſs in paſſing upon the road, within five miles of any city, or town corporate, or borough that ſends burgeſſes to parliament; or within five miles of any pariſh, town, or place where they have taken upon them to

preach; upon forfeiture, for every ſuch offence, of the ſum of forty pounds; one third to the king, another third to the poor of the pariſh, and another to him that ſhall ſue for it;" and if ſuch perſon keep a ſchool, he ſhall forfeit, likewiſe, for every ſuch offence, "forty pounds; and any two juſtices of the peace may, upon oath made of any of theſe offences, commit ſuch offender for ſix months, without bail or main-prize." They are alſo liable, on conviction upon oath of two witneſſes, before one or more juſtices of the peace, of having preached; for the firſt offence, to a penalty of twenty pounds; and for every ſuch offence afterwards, to a penalty of forty pounds. And by another act, for every ſuch offence they are liable to ſuffer three months impriſonment in the common jail, without bail or main-prize. And every time they adminiſter the Lord's ſupper, they are liable to a penalty of one hundred pounds; one moiety to go to the king, another moiety to be divided between the poor of the pariſh, and ſuch

perſon

perſon or perſons as ſhall ſue for the ſame by action of debt, bill, plaint, or information, in any court of record, wherein no eſſoign, protection, or wager of law ſhall be allowed.

To theſe ſevere penalties, ſuch Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters as have not ſubſcribed the Articles before-mentioned, are expoſed: and, in the laſt caſe, a very ample reward is propoſed to every proſecutor, out of the forfeiture incurred; and the proſecution is, at the ſame time, made as eaſy as poſſible *.

This is the ſituation we are left in by the Act of Toleration. It is only by complying with the ſubſcription enjoined by it, that we can legally be permitted to conduct the worſhip of the God and Father of mercies in that manner which we think agreeable to the dictates of truth, Scripture, and conſcience; and the penalties to which we are otherwiſe ſubject are ſuch, that every ingenuous and

* See the Caſe of the Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters and Schoolmaſters.

liberal man muſt ſtart back with horror at the recital of them. Nay, they are penalties which even bigotry itſelf ſcarce dares to call for the exaction of, in the preſent age.

There is another circumſtance, of the greateſt importance, for which relief is not provided by the Act of Toleration, even upon any terms. The right of educating our children, according to our own views of what will be moſt conducive to their temporal and eternal felicity, is one of the deareſt rights of human nature; one of the laſt privileges, which a man would be willing to give up, who is endued with the feelings of parental affection, and the principles of piety, integrity, and honour. But this is a privilege to which the Proteſtant Diſſenters have no *legal* title. By the cruel laws of king Charles the ſecond, every nonconformiſt, of every kind, is diſabled from acting in the capacity of a tutor or ſchoolmaſter, and proſecutions cannot be diverted without conſiderable trouble and expence. This is a caſe that includes the Laity, as well

well as the Miniſters, and which does indeed ſpeak loudly for itſelf *.

Many perſons will, without doubt, be ready to wonder how it could poſſibly come to paſs, that the Toleration Act ſhould be ſo very defective. But this muſt be ſought for in the principles and ſpirit of the times.

At the glorious period of the Revolution, religious liberty, in its due extent, was, comparatively ſpeaking, very imperfectly underſtood. Experience had, indeed, inſtructed the nation, in the evil conſequences which had ariſen from perſecuting the nonconformiſts. It was found that the diſunion and animoſities of the Proteſtants were hurtful to the common cauſe, and added ſtrength to the ſchemes and enterprizes of the Papiſts. It was neceſſary, therefore, to unite the former together; and the ſincere and zealous concurrence of the Diſſenters, in promoting the late change of

* See the Caſe of the Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters and Schoolmaſters.

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government, was an additional reaſon for treating them with favour. King William was deſirous of conferring greater marks of diſtinction upon them than a bare toleration; but this was the whole that could be obtained, and it was even debated, whether the Toleration ſhould be allowed for more than a certain number of years. When its permanency was diſputed, it cannot be ſurprizing that it did not in other reſpects go upon enlarged principles. The truth of the caſe was, that the nation was not yet ſufficiently enlightened upon the ſubject. Toleration was not, indeed, forgotten among the important topics which were diſcuſſed during the time of the civil war: liberty of conſcience was pleaded for by the independents; and Dr. Owen, among others, wrote in its favour: but a due regard was not paid to their principles and reaſonings. The obnoxiouſneſs of the men to the two great parties of Epiſcopalians and Preſbyterians, had prevented the eaſy reception of any doctrine which came from

them, however juſt or generous it might in itſelf be. Locke's excellent Letters were but now beginning to make their appearance; and it was a long time before the admirable ſentiments contained in them came to be generally diffuſed. It was not doubted, but that perſons, who entertained certain doctrines called heretical, were by no means fit to be tolerated; and the principal part of the nonconformiſts, notwithſtanding the long perſecution they had endured, had not yet diveſted themſelves of this perſuaſion. They did not think of queſtioning the right of the civil magiſtrate to impoſe ſubſcription to human teſts of faith and orthodoxy: they even believed it to be his duty to reſtrain what were apprehended to be fundamental errors and hereſies: and though ſome miniſters might entertain more liberal views of things, they were glad to accept of liberty of conſcience on ſuch terms as were offered, and could then be obtained. Theſe terms were the leſs diſagreeable to them, as being Calviniſts, or nearly Calviniſts, they had

had ſcarce any difficulties with regard to the doctrinal Articles; but could chearfully ſubſcribe them, as containing their own real opinions*.

But ſince the period we have been ſpeaking of, a great, a juſt, and important revolution hath taken place in the ſentiments of the Proteſtant Diſſenters upon theſe ſubjects. Moſt of the Diſſenting Clergy ground their ſeparation from the eſtabliſhment on principles that differ, in ſome conſiderable reſpects, from thoſe upon which their anceſtors proceeded. We do, indeed, agree with the original Puritans in the deſire they had to diſcard entirely the corruptions of popery, and to reſtore Chriſtian worſhip to the ſimplicity and purity of the Goſpel ſtandard. We applaud their conduct in

* Some expreſſions in the Articles appearing dubious to Mr. Baxter, he drew up a brief explication, which he gave in for his ſenſe at the time of his ſubſcription, and many of his brethren concurred with him in giving the ſame explication. It is inſerted in Calamy's Abridgment of the Life of Baxter. Vol. I. p. 469—476.

reſiſting

reſiſting ſo firmly the unſcriptural terms of conformity impoſed upon them, and we retain a grateful remembrance of their integrity and fortitude. We have, in particular, the utmoſt veneration for the memory of thoſe two thouſand men, who, in the year 1662, nobly ſacrificed their preferments and their ſubſiſtence for the cauſe of God and a good conſcience. But, at the ſame time, we do not diſſent ſo much as they did, on account of ſcruples with regard to certain ceremonies, habits, and modes of government and diſcipline; nor do we diſſent ſolely on account of ſome objections which may be urged againſt the Liturgy and Offices of the church of England. It is true, that we have our difficulties on theſe heads, and ſeveral of them are of a ſerious and weighty nature. Several of them are ſuch as, while they ſubſiſt, muſt for ever keep us at a diſtance from conformity. But beſides the particular objections we have to a number of the rites and forms of the national worſhip, we found our diſſent on what appear to us to be moſt important general reaſons. We

diſſent, becauſe we deny the right of any body of men, whether civil or eccleſiaſtical, to impoſe human teſts, creeds, or articles; and becauſe we think it our duty, not to ſubmit to any ſuch authority, but to proteſt againſt it, as a violation of our eſſential liberty to judge and act for ourſelves in matters of religion. We diſſent, becauſe we apprehend that the church of England, in the requiſition of a ſubſcription to her doctrines and ceremonies, claims and exerciſes a power which we look upon as derogatory to the honour of our great Maſter, the ſole legiſlator in his own kingdom; and becauſe we believe ourſelves bound, as his profeſſed diſciples and followers, to ſtand up for his honour in oppoſition to all encroachments.

Independently, therefore, of the truth of the Thirty-nine Articles, the generality of Diſſenting Miniſters object to the impoſition of theſe Articles. Perſuaded as they are of the ſufficiency of Scripture, and the liberty every one ought to have of following the guidance of his own conſcience

ſcience in religious concerns, they will not ſubſcribe to formularies, which they themſelves believe, when ſuch formularies are preſſed upon them by an incompetent and uſurped authority. It is their fixed principle, that the writings of the Old and New Teſtament, are the only rule of faith and practice; and, therefore, were they, in matters of religion, and when aſking for a Toleration, to go any farther in their ſubmiſſion to the civil magiſtrate, than to make this declaration of their Chriſtian and Proteſtant character, being the ſpecific character in which they appear before the legiſlature, they would be guilty of an act of treaſon againſt their Lord and Saviour. How far they may be well founded in theſe ſentiments is not my buſineſs, at preſent, to determine. Their views of things may appear to ſome too refined, to others wholly fanciful; but that has no relation to the queſtion before us. Theſe opinions are matters of conſcience, and the perſons who entertain them ought to be indulged, ought to be tolerated, provid-

ed they are peaceable members of the community.

That this is a faithful account of the ſtate of things among the Proteſtant Diſſenters is evident not only from the general ſtrain of their late publications, but from two facts which are worthy of the reader's notice. The firſt is the ſolemn declaration of a majority of the Diſſenting Clergy, in the year 1719, when a controverſy having ariſen on the ſubject of the Trinity, a meeting of the miniſters in and about London was held at Salters-hall, to conſider of *Articles of Advice for Peace*, to be ſent to their brethren and to the congregations in other places. At this meeting, it was propoſed to inſert in the Advices the firſt Article of the Church of England, and the Anſwers to the fifth and ſixth Queſtions in the Aſſembly's Catechiſm; but the requiſition was nobly withſtood by the more enlightened part of the body, and it was carried, by a majority of fifty-ſeven againſt fifty-three, *That no human compoſitions or interpretations of the doctrine of the Trinity ſhould be made*

made a part of the Articles of Advice. It is obſervable, that all of theſe fifty-ſeven miniſters were believers, and moſt of them zealous aſſerters of the commonly-received opinions with regard to the Trinity; but they thought it their duty to ſtand up for the liberty wherewith Chriſt has made us free, and to enter their proteſt againſt the yoke of human impoſitions. It is much to the honour of this ſmall but illuſtrious majority, that it appears to be the firſt inſtance in which a body of clergymen publicly aſſerted and maintained the cauſe of religious freedom, and the ſacred rights of conſcience*.

That the fifty-ſeven miniſters were real believers of the common opinion concerning the Trinity, is evident from the following paſſage, which is taken from the Letter written by them, in conjunction with ſixteen more of their brethren, accompany-

* The author doth not intend to caſt any reflection upon the ſubſcribing miniſters, who were undoubtedly perſons of diſtinguiſhed piety, and acted from a ſtrong ſenſe of duty: but he muſt be allowed to give the preference, in his eſteem, to their more enlightened brethren.

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ing the Advices they had agreed to ſend to Exeter.

" We freely declare, that we utterly diſown the Arian doctrine, and ſincerely believe the doctrine of the bleſſed *Trinity*, and the *proper* divinity of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, which we apprehend to be clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures; but are far from condemning any who appear to be with us in the main, though they ſhould chuſe not to declare themſelves in other than Chriſtian terms, or not in ours."

This Declaration they farther explained thus:

" The human words *Trinity* and *proper divinity*, in this *Declaration* of our faith, are uſed only to notify the things we ſpeak of; and we do not preſume, in the way of *teſt*, to go into any particular explanations of thoſe things, either in our *own*, or *other* mens words: but for that we refer to the Holy Scriptures, whence it may appear, that we take the Scripture account of thoſe things to be the

the *beſt* and fitteſt we can uſe on ſuch occaſions."

The fourth article of the Advices was as follows:

"If, after all, a public hearing be inſiſted on, we think the Proteſtant principle, that *the Bible is the only and the perfect rule of faith*, obliges thoſe who have the caſe before them, not to condemn any man upon the authority of human deciſions, or becauſe he conſents not to human forms or phraſes: but then only is he to be cenſured, *as not holding the faith neceſſary to ſalvation*, when it appears that he contradicts, or refuſes to own, the *plain and expreſs declarations of Holy Scripture*, in what is there made neceſſary to be believed, and in matters there ſolely revealed. And we truſt that all will treat the ſervants of their common Lord, as they who expect the final deciſion at his appearing*."

Though,

* The only ſurviving perſon of the non-ſubſcribing miniſters is Mr. Henry Read, a gentleman whom a long life of irreproachable piety and diſtinguiſhed uſefulneſs hath rendered truly venerable. He is the father of the preſent body of Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters, is in the

Though, in 1719, the Diſſenting Miniſters were almoſt equally divided in their opinions concerning human teſts, the ſituation of things is now happily changed, much for the better in this reſpect, as will be manifeſt from the ſecond fact I have to produce. It is well known, that Dr. Furneaux hath ſtated and defended the preſent principles of the Diſſenters upon the enlarged grounds I have mentioned, and not upon ſcruples relative to particular articles or doctrines. That he hath truly ſtated and defended their preſent principles admits of no doubt, from the thanks which, at the motion of one of our moſt ancient, eminent, and reſpectable miniſters *, were unanimouſly voted to him, by the general body of the three denominations of Preſbyterians, Independents, and Baptiſts, for his Letters to the Hon. Mr. Juſtice Blackſtone. I ſhall beg leave to lay before the public the minutes of the proceedings with regard to this affair.

the eighty-ſeventh year of his age, and expreſſed his entire approbation of the late application to Parliament.

* Dr. Prior.

" At

" At a meeting of the general body of the Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters, of the three denominations, in and about the cities of London and Weſtminſter, held at the Library, in Red-croſs-ſtreet, April 16, 1771.

" Agreed, at the motion of Mr. Prior, that the thanks of this body be given to the Rev. Dr. Furneaux, for the great ſervice he has done to the cauſe of religious liberty in general, and for his able defence of the rights and privileges of Proteſtant Diſſenters in particular, in his excellent Letters to the Honourable Mr. Juſtice Blackſtone; and that the chairman do preſent the thanks of this body to the Rev. Dr. Furneaux, in their name with the firſt convenient opportunity."

" At a meeting of the general body, Nov. 20, 1771.

" Reported, by Mr. Pitts, chairman of the laſt meeting of the general body, that he had, according to order, returned the thanks of this body to the Rev. Dr. Furneaux, and received a letter from the doctor, which was read.

" Agreed, at the motion of Dr. Harris That Dr. Furneaux's letter to Mr. Pitts be, with Mr. Pitts's leave, tranſcribed into this book; of which letter the following is a copy.

" Reverend and dear ſir,

" I am extremely ſorry, that I did not happen to be at home, when you did me the favour of a viſit this morning. I hope I ſhall have the pleaſure of your company on ſome other occaſion.

" Your two laſt favours, the one acquainting me with the reſolution of the general body of the Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters, in and about the cities of London and Weſtminſter, with reſpect to my Letters to Mr. Juſtice Blackſtone, and the other incloſing that Reſolution, as it ſtands on the Minutes, conveyed to me an honour of which I had not the leaſt apprehenſion, and of the value of which I am very ſenſible. This unanimous approbation of my brethren of all denominations is, in the preſent caſe, the more

agreeable

agreeable to me, as it is a clear proof that I have not, in any manner, misrepresented the principles of the Protestant Dissenters on the head of religious liberty. My aim was only to do them justice; and that so respectable a body, who must know their own sentiments, and cannot be supposed ignorant of those which prevail amongst the Dissenting Ministers and people in general, have declared their opinion that I have not done them injustice, gives me, I own, no small satisfaction. All beyond this I esteem (as I ought) to be a demonstration of their candour and friendship. I acknowledge, with thanks, the very obliging manner, in which you, sir, as chairman, have acquainted me with the sentiments of the body, and am

" Your very affectionate brother,

" and obedient humble servant,

" Clapham, April
" 25th, 1771.

" PHILIP FURNEAUX."

Such then, as I have ſtated them, may now be conſidered the general principles of the Diſſenting Miniſters; ſo that however firmly they may believe the doctrinal Articles of the Church of England, they cannot but be averſe to having a ſubſcription to them impoſed by human authority, and muſt ſincerely deſire an enlargement of the Toleration Act. It may, perhaps, be a matter of curioſity to know how ſuch an alteration hath been brought about in the ſentiments of the Diſſenters; and it muſt chiefly be aſcribed to the particular attention which hath been paid to the ſubject of religious liberty, from the period of the Revolution to the preſent time. Mr. Locke's admirable Letters on Toleration, had, no doubt, a conſiderable effect on the minds of thoughtful and philoſophical perſons. But the circumſtance which much contributed to open the eyes of Diſſenting Miniſters, was Dr. Calamy's Introduction to the ſecond volume of his Defence of Moderate Nonconformity. From henceforward, the controverſy between the Church

Church of England and the Diſſenters, was placed, in part, on a new footing. The ſolid and manly reaſonings of Dr. Calamy have been confirmed and purſued through all their conſequences. It is an undoubted fact, that his arguments were approved of by Mr. Locke; and biſhop Hoadly himſelf appears to have been enlightened by them. It is certain, at leaſt, that he availed himſelf of the ſame method of reaſoning in his ſubſequent writings: and from the time of the Hoadlian controverſy to the preſent day, the objections to the exerciſe of human authority in matters of religion; and the arguments in favour of the right of private judgment, the ſufficiency of Scripture, and the ſole dominion of Chriſt over his Church, have been exhibited in ſuch a variety of unanſwerable performances, that the man who did not ground his ſeparation from the eſtabliſhment, chiefly upon theſe conſiderations, would ſcarce be thought worthy the name of a Diſſenter. The Preſbyterians in particular, with regard to their notions of eccleſiaſtical

power

power and government, are a different ſet of men from the Preſbyterians of the laſt century. The Engliſh Preſbyterians of this age have diſcarded all ideas of parochial ſeſſions, claſſes, provincial ſynods, and general aſſemblies. They diſclaim all coercive juriſdiction in ſpiritual concerns; and believe, that every diſtinct and ſeparate congregation ought to be the ſole director of its religious affairs, without being controulable by, or accountable to any other earthly authority. In ſhort, except their denial of any ſcriptural diſtinction between the office of a Biſhop and a Preſbyter, and their uniting in the ſame mode of worſhip, they retain little of Preſbyterianiſm, properly ſo called, but the name.

I cannot avoid ſtopping a moment to obſerve, that the alterations produced in the ſentiments of religious ſects, while the original denominations are continued, ought to be particularly noticed by eccleſiaſtical writers; for, unleſs a conſiderable degree of attention be paid to theſe things, the accounts which are given of the different

parties

parties that have divided the church of Chriſt, muſt be very confuſed, imperfect, and diſſatisfactory. I have often had occaſion to remark, that even ſome of the beſt church hiſtorians have fallen into errors in this reſpect.

But though, from what hath been alleged, it is apparent that the generality of Diſſenting Miniſters, however ſtrongly they may believe in the particular doctrines contained in the Thirty-nine Articles, muſt object to the terms required by the Toleration Act, and wiſh to be exempted from a compliance with them; it cannot, at the ſame time, be denied, and it ought not to be concealed, that a number of perſons among us, diſlike, in many reſpects, the doctrines themſelves; and, therefore, have a powerful additional reaſon for deſiring and ſoliciting the removal of ſubſcription.

A courſe of time hath produced a great alteration in the ſentiments of ſeveral of our brethren. Doctrines, formerly diſputed by few, have, during the preſent century, been freely called in queſtion; and

and opinions have been entertained very different from thoſe of Calvin and Athanaſius. Whether men have acted right in rejecting the dogmas of the ſpirited reformer, and the zealous ſaint, is of no importance to determine. The only queſtion is, whether thoſe who do not believe the doctrinal Articles, have not the ſame reaſonable claim to indulgence as their predeceſſors had, with regard to the Articles more immediately relative to ceremonies, diſcipline, and church authority: and here, if the matter be conſidered with reference to the great object which political government hath in view, it will eaſily be decided. Suppoſing a perſon ſhould happen to embrace what are deemed the particular and diſtinguiſhing tenets of Arminius, Arius, or Socinus, what hath all this to do with the welfare of the ſtate? The buſineſs of the magiſtrate, as hath unanſwerably been ſhewn by Mr. Locke, is to take care of the temporal, and not of the eternal intereſts of mankind. With regard to the things which concern our future life, we are accountable to God alone,

alone, and to our great Lord and Maſter Jeſus Chriſt. With reſpect to religious concerns, the civil power ought to go no farther, in the way of reſtraint and puniſhment, at leaſt, than to prevent different ſects from injuring each other; and to take care that they do not, on any pretence, diſturb the public tranquility. It will readily, I imagine, be granted, that Arminians may be valuable members of ſociety, and worthy of its protection; becauſe, notwithſtanding the Calviniſtical ſtructure of the Thirty-nine Articles, the majority of the clergy are profeſſedly Arminians: and why may not Arians and Socinians be equally valuable members of ſociety, and equally worthy of its protection? I ſpeak here ſolely of them in a civil capacity, the only capacity with which the ſtate is properly and juſtly concerned. What is there in the opinions of theſe men, which diſqualifies them from being good ſubjects, or enjoying a legal ſecurity? Do they advance doctrines ſubverſive of the general peace and ſafety? Nothing of this kind can be charged upon them, with

the leaſt ſhadow of reaſon or juſtice. If they hold any ſentiments that may be ſuppoſed to be highly erroneous, or even dangerous to their ſalvation, that is a matter of which the ſupreme Being alone hath a right to take cognizance, and which muſt be determined at his tribunal. Let not men, therefore, preſume to claim a juriſdiction over the conſciences of their fellow-creatures, but remember that God hath committed all judgment to his Son.

It appears, then, from what hath been advanced, that if there be Diſſenting Miniſters who do not believe ſeveral of the doctrinal Articles of the church of England, as there undoubtedly are, they ought not to be obliged to ſubſcribe; becauſe, without doing it, they have a natural right to Toleration. The conduct of the ſtate, and of the public, for more than fifty years, hath already determined that they have ſuch a right. Though it be a known fact, that many of the Diſſenting Clergy have not ſubmitted, and cannot ſubmit, to the ſubſcription requir-

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ed of them by law, they have been allowed to go on quietly in their religious employments; and the experience of half a century hath proved, that the lenity ſhewn to them hath been of no prejudice to the community. The change of their ſituations and ſentiments is ſuch, that, if the indulgence they have hitherto met with be withdrawn, they muſt be expoſed to all the perſecutions which diſgraced the reign of king Charles the ſecond. But the continuation of the indulgence doth not depend merely on the equity and moderation of government; it depends, likewiſe, on the equity and moderation of every individual in this country: it depends on there not being a ſingle perſon in the nation, who can be prevailed upon to diſturb us, either by the dictates of bigotry, or the ſtimulations of avarice. Why then ſhould bands be ſuffered to remain about us, that are confeſſedly needleſs and uſeleſs; and which, though hanging looſe around us at preſent, may, at the pleaſure of any one, be drawn ſo cloſe as to become very painful, and

even intolerable? It is not ſurely deſirable for penal laws to ſubſiſt, which, at beſt, are unneceſſary; and which, if carried into execution, muſt be productive of flagrant injuſtice and cruelty. The permitting of them to be continued, when a proper application is made for their repeal, is contrary to every principle of a wiſe and equitable legiſlation.

Thoſe perſons, who think that we ought to have reſted ſatisfied with the connivance ſo long granted us, do not appear to me to have conſidered the matter with due attention. A ſtate of connivance is greatly inferior to a ſtate of legal ſecurity. Will any one aſſert, that the liberties and privileges we enjoy as Britons, are not infinitely more valuable, as founded in law, than if they depended entirely on the character and diſpoſition of the ſovereign, whatever probability there might be of a ſucceſſion of wiſe, juſt, and merciful princes? It is the glory of the Britiſh conſtitution, that it is built on more ſolid foundations than the good intentions of men, and the accidental tem-

temper of ages. The very conſciouſneſs of enjoying the moſt invaluable benefits only by the connivance of our fellow-creatures muſt be grating to every generous mind. Beſides, who can anſwer for it, that a ſtate of connivance ſhall never be interrupted? It is poſſible at leaſt, if not probable, that other men and other times may ſucceed to thoſe we have now the happineſs of beholding; and, therefore, I cannot but think, that the Diſſenting Miniſters acted wiſely, in endeavouring to improve what they believed a favourable opportunity for obtaining a legal ſecurity to themſelves and their poſterity, in the exerciſe of that liberty of conſcience, which they deem the moſt important and ſacred bleſſing that Providence can put into their hands.

In the late application to Parliament, we grounded our hopes of ſucceſs not only on the circumſtances which I have already mentioned, but upon a variety of additional conſiderations. We were conſcious that we lived under a prince of the Brunſwick line; a prince, with regard to whom, it would

would be ſhameful to aſſert, that he is not as ready to defend, and even to enlarge the juſt and reaſonable privileges of his ſubjects as any of his royal predeceſſors. We believed that adminiſtration could have no objection to a requeſt that was moſt equitable in itſelf, and which might have been granted without the ſhadow of injury, danger, or diſturbance to the public. With regard to the members of both Houſes of Parliament, we truſted that their wiſdom and moderation would diſpoſe them to reſcue the Statute Book from penal acts which are a diſgrace to it, and to give relief to a peaceable body of men, who did not deſerve to be marked out by the laws, as criminals, hateful to the ſtate. As to the biſhops in particular, we had been taught to expect every thing from the mild and candid ſpirit of the preſent bench. We knew that the ſentiments of all ranks of men were, for the moſt part, averſe to reſtraint and ſeverity in matters of religion; and we were not ignorant that TOLERATION had lately lifted up her voice ſo loudly in Europe, as to be heard

heard and attended to, even in arbitrary and popiſh governments.

Encouraged by ſuch a number of flattering appearances, we ventured, with all humility and reſpect, to lay our caſe before the Legiſlature, and to ſolicit an enlargement of the Toleration Act. The final reſult of the application is well known. Our bill, after having paſſed the Houſe of Commons, was rejected in the Houſe of Peers by a large majority. But notwithſtanding the mortification of our defeat, there are ſome circumſtances which we can reflect upon with pleaſure, as not a little honourable to our cauſe. It is undoubtedly a great credit to the bill, that it went through the Lower Houſe with ſo general a concurrence. The free and unbiaſſed voice of the repreſentatives of the people was ſtrongly in its favour; and that is a matter which muſt appear important in the public eye, and will, we truſt, not be deſtitute of valuable effects.*

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* The motion for leave to bring in the bill was made by ſir Henry Hoghton, a gentleman of irreproachable integrity, of a cultivated underſtanding, and a liberal mind;

The reaſonableneſs and equity of our petition were well debated and nobly ſupported in both houſes; and none will dare to deny, that with us were the moſt able, judicious, and eloquent ſpeakers. I proceed not to particular names, becauſe I am incapable of doing juſtice to their characters and merit; but they are ſuch as will carry down the hiſtory of our application with honour even to the remoteſt

mind; and it was ſeconded by Sir George Savile, whoſe eminent abilities and character are univerſally known and acknowledged. The ſpeakers in favour of the bill, at different times, beſides the above-mentioned gentlemen, were Frederick Montagu, Eſq. the Right Hon. George Onſlow, Eſq. the Hon. Conſtantine John Phipps, Eſq. Edmund Burke, Eſq. the Right Hon. Lord Viſcount Clare, Jeremiah Dyſon, Eſq. John Sawbridge, Eſq. Sir Joſeph Mawbey, Bart. the Hon. Stephen Fox, Eſq. Charles Wolfranc Cornwall, Eſq. Sir William Meredith, Bart. Colonel Jennings, James Harris, Eſq. Richard Whitworth, Eſq. the Right Hon. George Rice, Eſq. and the Right Hon. Lord John Cavendiſh. Theſe are names which do honour to our cauſe. Many other members, of the moſt diſtinguiſhed capacities and merit, were ready to have ſpoken in its ſupport; but the oppoſition to the bill in the Houſe of Commons was ſo feeble as to render a farther diſplay of reaſon and eloquence totally unneceſſary.

times.

times. We had the peculiar ſatisfaction of knowing that the two greateſt of the law lords † divided for the commitment of the bill; an evident proof that they conſidered the principle it went upon as the proper object of legiſlation, and the cauſe it was intended to ſupport as the cauſe of equity and good government. On the one ſide were truth, reaſon, eloquence, juſtice, and religion; on the other—PUDET HÆC OPPROBIA—DICI POTUISSE—moſt of the temporal peers, and ALL THE BISHOPS.*

But notwithſtanding theſe pleaſing and honourable circumſtances, our adverſaries have abundant reaſon for rejoicing. It might, however, have been expected that they would have ſatisfied themſelves with privately exulting at our defeat; but that, it ſeems, was not a ſufficient diſplay of their triumph. In the pride of parliamentary victory, they have thought proper to draw out the pen againſt us, and to attack

† Lord Mansfield and Lord Camden.

* All the biſhops who were preſent in the Houſe of Peers, or who ordered their proxies to be given in oppoſition to the bill.

us, with all the formality of eccleſiaſtical pedantry, upon the MATTER, the MANNER, and the TIME of our application. It was not, perhaps, wiſe in them, to move a controverſy which might otherwiſe have lain dormant. If we had been permitted to return quietly to our miniſterial labours and ſtudies, we might have waited in ſilence for a more favourable opportunity of urging our cauſe. But ſince we are wantonly provoked to the conteſt, let us engage in it with alacrity and temper, and attend ſomewhat more particularly to the MATTER, the MANNER, and the TIME of our application.

As to the MATTER of our application, THAT ſhould ſeem to be ſufficiently vindicated by what hath already been offered. The reaſons for it were ſo ſtrong and weighty, that it might have been expected every candid perſon would acknowledge that we had juſt cauſe for having recourſe to legiſlature. What could be a more proper requeſt to legiſlature than to be delivered from a ſubjection to laws, which, confeſſedly, cannot be put into execution? But ſince particular difficulties

culties have been ſtarted upon this head, it may not be amiſs to pay them ſome degree of attention.

One objection then, which hath been urged againſt the late application of the Diſſenting Miniſters, is drawn from the Act of Toleration, as if that act could not admit of improvement. It is, it ſeems, a fundamental law of the ſtate, which hath fixed bounds for ever to the exerciſe of liberty of conſcience, and determined what doctrines ſhould always be held by the profeſſors of Chriſtianity, of every denomination, in this country. But what foundation can there be for ſuch a repreſentation of things? That toleration is eſſential to every well-formed ſyſtem of government will moſt readily be granted; but that a partial and defective toleration cannot be extended, is ſurely a ſtrange poſition.

We have ſhewn that the Act of Indulgence, which paſſed in the beginning of the reign of king William and queen Mary, evidently partook of the imperfect ideas of the times; that men were not, at

that period, enlightened enough to grant a greater degree of religious freedom; and that the principal part of the Diſſenters did not wiſh to be exempted from doctrinal ſubſcriptions. But what right had the legiſlators of that age ſo abſolutely to ſettle the limits of toleration, as to ſay, HITHERTO SHALT THOU GO, AND NO FARTHER? If THEY thought that it was neceſſary to ſubſcribe certain teſts, in order to be admitted to any liberty of worſhip, they had no authority to determine, that ſuch teſts ſhould always be conſidered as eſſential to the enjoyment of the public protection. The confining of indulgence to the belief of particular tenets, or to a compliance with human articles, was, at that time, contrary to the principles of reaſon, legiſlation, Chriſtianity, and Proteſtantiſm; but to have pretended to fix theſe terms for future periods, ſo that it ſhould not be in the power of ſucceeding generations to alter or reverſe them, would have been abſurd in the higheſt degree. It would have been both contrary to the principles upon which ALONE the Reformation

mation could be juſtified, and to the very deſign and ſpirit of the Toleration Act. Its intention was, to give relief to ſuch ſcrupulous conſciences as then exiſted; when, therefore, other ſcruples of conſcience ariſe among men, who are upright and peaceable members of the community, it is agreeable to the real genius and meaning of that act, that ſuch caſes ſhould be provided for. I ſhould wiſh to be informed, how long this idea of its being a pactum conventum, never, in any reſpect, to be improved, hath been ſtarted. I have not before met with it in the courſe of my reading, and believe that it hath not been advanced by any gentlemen learned in the law. It ſeems to be, evidently, an EPISCOPAL invention, produced, without the colour of reaſon or equity, to prevent the ſucceſs of the late application. However high and reſpectable, therefore, may be the rank of the perſons from whom the notion proceeded; and however largely it may have lately been inſiſted upon; I beg leave to diſmiſs it with contempt, as big with abſurdity and falſehood;

hood; as repugnant to every juſt idea of the nature of Chriſtianity, the end of civil government, and the reaſonable demands of Toleration.

Another thing, which hath been much inſiſted upon, is the vagueneſs of the declaration propoſed to the legiſlature, in the room of the ſubſcription heretofore required; but in no reſpect can it be proved to be ſo. "WE DECLARE, AS IN THE PRESENCE OF ALMIGHTY GOD, THAT WE BELIEVE THAT THE HOLY SCRIPTURES OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT CONTAIN A REVELATION OF THE MIND AND WILL OF GOD, AND THAT WE RECEIVE THEM AS THE RULE OF OUR FAITH AND PRACTICE." Now what can be a more explicit declaration of our Chriſtian and Proteſtant principles? To aſſert, as hath been aſſerted, that it may be made by a Deiſt, a Mohammedan, or a Papiſt, is very ſurprizing. Can an infidel ſay, that he believes that the holy Scriptures, of the Old and New Teſtament, contain a revelation of the mind and will of God, and that he receives them

them as THE rule of HIS faith and practice? Can a Mohammedan, whoſe ſtandard of doctrine and worſhip is the Koran, pretend that the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Teſtament are THE rule of HIS faith and practice? Or can the Roman Catholic, who holds the infallibility of the pope, or of general councils, and who maintains the authority of the traditions of the church, declare that the Scriptures are THE rule of HIS faith and practice? It is impoſſible, that any of theſe perſons could ſubſcribe the declaration with truth. They could not do it, conſiſtently with the principles they profeſs to embrace. In ſhort, by this declaration, Diſſenting Miniſters do, BONA FIDE, proclaim, that they are Chriſtians and Proteſtants, and may ſafely appeal to the great Searcher of hearts for the integrity of their conduct. With regard to any charge, or inſinuation to the contrary, I beg leave to borrow of Lord Chatham the beſt words that can be uſed upon the ſubject: "Whoever thinks ſo, thinks uncharitably; "and whoever ſays ſo, without proof, "is guilty of defamation."

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With regard to Popery, the Diſſenting Miniſters are ready, likewiſe, to ſubſcribe the Declaration required by law; to which may be added, that they CHEARFULLY take the oaths of allegiance and ſupremacy, and are deſirous of giving all reaſonable ſecurity to government, for their behaving in a manner that ſhall juſtly entitle them to its protection. Nothing more, therefore, ought to be required; and with reſpect to matters of doctrine, they can go no farther in their ſubmiſſion to the civil magiſtrate, than they have already offered to do. Were they to go farther, they would, as hath been ſhewn above, depart from their profeſſed principles, as Chriſtians, Proteſtants, and Proteſtant Diſſenters. Were they to go farther, they would break the bond which holds them together, and deſert the cauſe of truth and of God, in which they are united.

Two or three of our brethren have objected to the Declaration ITSELF, aſſented to by the committee, not as diſbelieving it, but as a demand which the magiſtrate has no

no right to make, and as a conceſſion which ought not to be ſubmitted to on our part. In anſwer to theſe gentlemen, I beg leave to obſerve, that my idea of Toleration is as large as theirs can poſſibly be, and that I wiſh to ſee it granted in its full extent. Religion is the buſineſs of the heart, and to be efficacious muſt be voluntary. Religion, in every form of it which is conſiſtent with the ſafety of the ſtate, has an unlimited title to indulgence. I do not, therefore, think that liberty of conſcience ought to be confined to Chriſtianity; nor do I think, that the magiſtrate hath, properly and ſtrictly, a right to interpoſe in religious matters, ſo as to lay ANY reſtraint upon, or to preſcribe ANY teſt, to thoſe who behave as peaceable ſubjects. I conſider the Declaration as needleſs, with regard to Diſſenting Miniſters; and am fully perſuaded, that they have a juſt and unexceptionable claim to be tolerated without it. In the ſixth year of the reign of king George the firſt, a Toleration was granted to the Diſſenters in Ireland, on the terms only of ſubſcribing the Decla-

ration againſt Popery, and taking the oaths of allegiance and ſupremacy; and this appears to be a ſecurity to the ſtate, which is abundantly ſufficient. Its ſufficiency has been proved, by the experience of more than half a century; during which, not the leaſt diſadvantage hath ariſen to government from granting liberty of conſcience on ſuch generous principles. We know, too, that the Epiſcopalians have been tolerated in Scotland upon the like terms. For theſe reaſons, I ſhould be better pleaſed if we could be admitted to the benefit of the Toleration Act, upon the ſame conditions which are annexed to it in Ireland; and I ſhould have deemed it abſolutely my duty, to refuſe conceding to the Declaration of the bill, if it had been apprehended, that it would have left any ſcrupulous brother in a worſe ſtate than he was in before. But as the committee were perſuaded that this would not have been the caſe, and underſtood that ſome declaration was expected, they were deſirous of obtaining an important addition to religious liberty, in a way which they believ-

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ed conſiſtent with the univerſal principles of the Diſſenters. Let it be remembered, that it was not the buſineſs of the Diſſenting Miniſters, in their late application, to take upon them the cauſe of all mankind, however ſincerely they might wiſh the moſt unlimited indulgence to the ſacred rights of conſcience. They were not conſtituted deputies of the whole human race, but appeared in the particular character of Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters, and aſked the relief which was wiſhed for in that particular ſituation. Could they, therefore, really object, or could they expect that any of their brethren would object to their declaring the diſtinguiſhing and univerſal principles of the Diſſenting Clergy? Could they refuſe to tell their names? Could they heſitate, for the ſake of receiving an important benefit, to confeſs a truth we all glory in, THAT WE BELIEVE THAT THE HOLY SCRIPTURES OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT CONTAIN A REVELATION OF THE MIND AND WILL OF GOD, AND THAT WE RECEIVE THEM AS THE RULE OF OUR FAITH AND PRAC-

TICE? Whether the magiſtrate has, or has not, a right to aſk us who, or what we are, can it be criminal in us to declare our common denomination and principle? Can it be criminal in us to ſay, that we are Chriſtians and Proteſtants? The ſubmitting to an unjuſt demand, does not imply an acknowledgment of the authority by which it is made. Such a demand may be honeſtly complied with, when we only teſtify a truth, in order to avoid a real evil, and to gain an important good. Beſides, the Declaration is, in reality, a diſavowal of human authority in matters of religion. It is ſo far from departing from our allegiance to our great Lord and Maſter, that it is an aſſertion of it, in the moſt explicit terms. What is it that uſually, and as Chriſtians, we mean by human authority, in matters of religion? Is it not the impoſition of Articles, Creeds, and Confeſſions, and the inſiſting upon terms of Communion, which our bleſſed Saviour hath not appointed? But by the Declaration, we renounce, and enter our proteſt againſt any ſuch claim, and ſtand up for

the liberty to which we are called by the Goſpel.

Having, I hope, by theſe obſervations, ſet the conduct of the committee in a juſt light, I return to the objections of our common adverſaries. Agreeably to their declamations againſt the Declaration, as indeterminate and diſſatisfactory, they ſcarce treat us as Chriſtians, and would inſinuate that we are Deiſts; but I am totally at a loſs to conceive what poſſible grounds there can be for ſuch an inſinuation. The character of Chriſtians, and of Chriſtian Miniſters, is a character in which we rejoice and glory. That we are firm believers in the divine religion of the Son of God, appears in our diſcourſes, appears in our writings, and, we truſt, is viſible our lives. Thoſe Diſſenting Miniſters who have attacked ſeveral of the doctrines of the church of England, with the greateſt freedom and boldneſs, have given undeniable proofs of their ſincere faith in the Goſpel, and have exerted themſelves, with ability and zeal, in defence of its ſacred authority. Some of the beſt vindications of the Chriſtian revela-

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tion have come from men, who would have ſacrificed their lives rather than ſubſcribe the Thirty-nine Articles. In fact, where are infidels more likely to be found; among the clergy of an eſtabliſhment, who are invited to conformity, by the proſpect of honours and rewards, or among Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters, who, in general, can have no motives, but conſcience, and a regard to a future ſtate, for embracing a ſituation expoſed to many temporal inconveniences and diſcouragements? It would be invidious to enlarge upon this topic, but much might be ſaid upon it, by one who is ACQUAINTED WITH THE WORLD. As to this infamous accuſation of Deiſm, brought againſt the Diſſenting Clergy, we might farther appeal, in confutation of it, to their numerous productions. We might appeal to the names of many perſons, of reſpectable and eminent characters, who are now no more. We might appeal to the names of ſeveral living worthies; but Mr. Mauduit hath diſcuſſed this matter ſo excellently, in the concluſion of the third edition of his valuable pamphlet, that it

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is needleſs to add any thing upon the ſubject.

Another very extraordinary charge, urged againſt us, is, that if we refuſe to ſubſcribe the doctrinal Articles of the church of England, as required by the Toleration Act, we cut ourſelves off from the title and character of Proteſtants. This is really a curious diſcovery, which deſerves, no doubt, to be treated with all the reſpect that is due to the quarter from whence it came. PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY it ſeems, was fixed for the Diſſenters at the Revolution. It was abſolutely annexed to ſome doctrines, which, at that period, were deemed important and fundamental; and the leaſt departure from them totally deſtroys our Proteſtantiſm. But what then will become of many of the eſtabliſhed clergy, as well as of the Diſſenting Miniſters? A number of the eſtabliſhed Clergy have as notoriouſly departed from the ſtandard of faith, preſcribed to them, as any of the Nonconformiſts. The Miniſters of the national form of religion do, indeed, ſubſcribe the

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Thirty-nine Articles; but that will not render them true Proteſtants, becauſe Proteſtantiſm, according to the notion lately ſtarted, conſiſts in a belief of the doctrines impoſed upon the clergy in the reign of queen Elizabeth, and upon the Diſſenters at the acceſſion of William and Mary. What havoc will this opinion make among many of the brighteſt luminaries of the church of England, and what deſtruction in the writings of thoſe who have been juſtly eſteemed the ableſt adverſaries to Popery!

But let us ſee what is the true nature of Proteſtantiſm, and what the real principles are, on which it is founded. I had always underſtood, that a Proteſtant was one who appealed to the Scriptures, as the ſole rule of faith and practice; and who rejected the abſurdities, corruptions, and abominations of the church of Rome. This I found aſſerted in a thouſand writers, and the truth of it I knew to be evident, from the whole hiſtory of the Reformation. Teſtimonies to this purpoſe might be produced, were it neceſſary, from a prodigious num-

number of valuable authors, foreign and domeſtic, reaching through a period of two hundred and fifty years. But I ſhall content myſelf with one late teſtimony, and it is a teſtimony which cannot but be thought deciſive, as it comes from a dignitary of the eſtabliſhment, whoſe orthodoxy hath never been called in queſtion. I mean the truly ingenious and learned Dr. Hurd, whoſe beautiful critical writings, and admirable dialogues, are well known to every man of taſte in this country, and who hath lately done conſiderable ſervice to the cauſe of religion by his Introduction to the Study of Prophecy. In the twelfth ſermon * he obſerves, that "this concluſion, that THE POPE IS "ANTICHRIST, and that other, that "THE SCRIPTURE IS THE SOLE RULE OF "CHRISTIAN FAITH, were the TWO "great principles on which the Re-"formation was originally founded." In the latter of theſe principles the Diſſenters are united without a ſingle exception; and I believe that they hold the

* Page 420, ſecond edition.

former of them more ſtrongly and univerſally than any other body of Proteſtants whatever.

May we not then, after what hath been produced, ſafely aſk, whether people may not be genuine Proteſtants, though they do not come up to the ſtandard of doctrines required to be ſubſcribed by the Act of Toleration? May we not aſſert, that ſuch of the non-ſubſcribing Diſſenting Miniſters as are not Calviniſts have a juſt claim to this character? We declare, in the moſt explicit terms, for the right of private judgment, the ſufficiency of Scripture, and the ſole religious authority of our Lord and Maſter Jeſus Chriſt. We proteſt againſt the impoſing ſpirit of the Church of Rome, and againſt all her pretenſions to infallibility and dominion. We proteſt againſt her monſtrous abſurdities, her ſhameful corruptions, and her contemptible ſuperſtitions. We proteſt againſt her horrid cruelties and bloody perſecutions. We proteſt againſt the claim and exerciſe of any ſimilar authority over the faith and conſciences of men. We proteſt

proteſt againſt making the Thirty-nine Articles, or other human teſts, the ſtandards of belief, as a thing which is ſubverſive of the eſſential principles of the Reformation: and, finally, we proteſt againſt the ſcandalous injuſtice of not being treated as Proteſtants.

As to the inſinuations which are occaſionally thrown out with regard to Arianiſm and Socinianiſm, it hath already been ſhewn that they are nothing to the purpoſe. They are, in fact, only the artifices of perſons who want to reduce the preſent queſtion, about the Extent of Toleration, to a debate concerning doctrines, with which it has not the leaſt connexion. Arians and Socinians, according to every principle of religion and policy, have as full a right to freedom of conſcience as any men, as any profeſſing Chriſtians whatever. It is, indeed, totally deſtructive of liberty to confine Toleration to certain particular tenets of the Goſpel, however important theſe tenets may be in a religious view. When the civil magiſtrate thus limits his protection and indulgence

to his ſubjects, he goes wholly out of his province: he aſſumes a power for which he hath no commiſſion from the nature of his office, and the exerciſe of which is equally injurious to the honour of the Supreme Being, and to the happineſs of mankind. It ought ever to be remembered, that God is able to maintain his own cauſe; and that truth only requires a fair and candid hearing in order to preſerve its ground, and finally to triumph over all oppoſition. To aſſert that the fundamental doctrines of the Goſpel ſtand in need of the aid of human laws to ſupport them, is the higheſt reflection upon thoſe doctrines. We have the aſſurance of our bleſſed Saviour, THAT THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST HIS CHURCH *; and this is an infinitely better ſecurity than the ARM OF FLESH. It is raſh and impious for men to touch, with their unhallowed hands, under the vain pretence of keeping it from being ſhaken, that ark of God which is ſuſtained by almighty power; and it behoves them to reflect how highly

* Matt. xvi. 18.

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offenſive ſuch a conduct muſt be to the Majeſty of heaven and earth. In fact, this maintenance of doctrines, by fines and impriſonments, by penalties and pains, inſtead of being favourable to the intereſts of truth and piety, hath been prejudicial to them in the higheſt degree. It hath been the ſource of numberleſs errors, of endleſs diviſions and animoſities, and of cruelties and perſecutions, which are an indelible diſgrace to the hiſtory of mankind.

But, in oppoſition to this juſt repreſentation of things, an alarming picture is ſet before us of the dreadful conſequences which muſt have enſued from an enlargement of the Toleration Act. The reſult of it, we are told, would have been the utmoſt diſcord and confuſion. A man, however, who hath any knowledge of the world, cannot help ſmiling at ſuch terrible apprehenſions, when there is not the leaſt ſhadow of danger. That there would not have been the leaſt ſhadow of danger hath been already determined by long experience. The liberty pleaded for hath been granted

granted by connivance; and it is allowed, that it muſt be continued to be granted in that manner. How then can that be pernicious which hath already ſubſiſted for a number of years, and which muſt, confeſſedly, ſtill ſubſiſt? The truth of the caſe is, that if our requeſt had been complied with, the conceſſion would have been followed by the moſt perfect tranquility. Had the bill paſſed both Houſes of Parliament, and received the royal aſſent, it would ſcarcely have been talked of a few days after, except to the honour of the ſtate and the church. The minds of Nonconformiſts would have been more and more conciliated to the eſtabliſhment, and leſs diſpoſed to attack it with ſeverity. The conſequences would have been entirely favourable and friendly to the public mode of religion, but not otherwiſe ſo to Diſſenting Miniſters and School-maſters, than as they would have been put into a legal ſituation.

To aſſert, however, that ſuch a ſituation is not likely to produce inconveniencies, is treated with contempt; and

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it is thrown out that the preſent laws are a reſtraint on our paſſions. But let us be permitted to ſay that this is a miſtake. The perſiſting to threaten, though there be be no intention to ſtrike, may irritate, but will not ſilence a liberal mind. I am perſuaded that ſeveral of my brethren will deliver their ſentiments the more freely in conſequence of the obſtinate refuſal which hath been given to their juſt and reaſonable requeſt; whereas otherwiſe they might have been induced to hold their peace by the dictates of gratitude, and the obligations of civility and good manners. The lenity of the governors of the church might have ſoothed us to repoſe; but we will not be AWE-STRUCK by their ſeverity. If the clergy imagine that they can affright us from an open exhibition of our opinions on every ſubject of religion, and on every queſtion, in which the rights of conſcience are concerned, by the vain terrors of penal laws, let them be aſſured, that they are totally unacquainted with our characters. If the prayer of our caſe had been complied with,

with, the author of the preſent tract, who hath been led, by inclination and duty, to the ſtudy of critical and hiſtorical learning, would probably never have engaged in any doctrinal controverſy, or in any diſputes with the national eſtabliſhment. But he now eſteems himſelf bound, by the moſt ſacred ties, to appear in the injured cauſe of humanity and religious liberty; and hopes that he ſhall always be ready to embrace every proper occaſion of ſtanding up for what he apprehends to be the intereſts of truth, Chriſtianity, and mankind.

Among the other evil conſequences of an extended Toleration, it is inſinuated, that Diſſenting Miniſters might become with impunity the preachers of ſedition. But what ground is there for ſuch an invidious ſurmiſe, as it is well known that they are willing to give ſecurity for their peaceable ſubjection to the civil magiſtrate? They are not diſpoſed to bring matters of policy and government into the pulpit: and though one worthy brother*

* Mr. Radcliff.

hath

hath been provoked to throw out, in a ſermon, dictated by genius and ſpirit, the language of manly indignation, let it be remembered that this is the reſult of liberty's being refuſed, not of its being enlarged. Our chief, I may venture to ſay, our ſole political diſcourſes, except on the ſeaſons occaſionally appointed by the ſtate for public faſts and thankſgivings, are confined to the fifth of November and the firſt of Auguſt. On theſe days, we are copious in our celebration of the glorious revolution in 1688, and the happy acceſſion of the illuſtrious houſe of Hanover in 1714. Our encomiums upon William the Third, George the Firſt, and George the Second, are expreſſed with all the ardor of veneration and affection; nor are we negligent in diſplaying our gratitude and zeal with regard to the prince who now adorns the Britiſh throne. Theſe things, we hope, will not be imputed to us as crimes, or be conſidered as objections to our enjoying the protection and favour of the preſent government.

But the clergy, it ſeems, have reaſon to be alarmed, leſt, in the courſe of human events, the Diſſenting Miniſters ſhould get into power; and then what would become of the Church of England? The members of it, it is intimated, might be in danger of being expelled, or even exterminated, as idolaters. If there be a likelihood of our ever riſing to be formidable, wiſdom and policy, perhaps, would ſay, that men who may poſſibly one day be uppermoſt, ought to be treated with lenity and indulgence while in a ſtate of ſubjection, that they may be diſpoſed to make ſuitable returns of affection and regard. But our worthy friends of the eſtabliſhment may diſmiſs every kind of fear for two reaſons. In the firſt place, there is no probability of our obtaining any ſuperiority or dominion; ſo that the biſhops and dignitaries, of the preſent age at leaſt, may reſt in perfect tranquillity. Secondly, if ever we ſhould get into power, and even thought the Church of England to be idolatrous, which is by no means a general or com-

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mon ſentiment among us, we are firmly perſuaded that Toleration ought to be extended to idolaters. In this point we have the honour of agreeing with a prelate * of diſtinguiſhed genius and literature; and in this point we diſagree with another great prelate, though, in many reſpects, we have the higheſt eſteem for his abilities, character, learning, and writings †.

It is farther objected to the late application, that only a ſmall number of Miniſters were concerned in it, ſo that, in reality, it might be conſidered as aſking a favour, which may almoſt be called perſonal. The beſt anſwer to this repreſentation of things is briefly to mention a few plain facts. At a meeting of the general body of the three denominations of Preſbyterians, Independents, and Antipœdobaptiſts, in and about London, held at the Library in Red-croſs-ſtreet, March 4th, 1772, fifty being preſent, it was re-

* Dr. Warburton, biſhop of Glouceſter.

† Dr. Lowth, biſhop of Oxford.

ſolved, That the taking off the Subſcription required of Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters, and the obtaining relief for Tutors and School-maſters, are very deſirable and important objects; that application ſhould be made to Parliament for theſe purpoſes; and that a committee be choſen to manage the affair, with power to ſummon the general body as they ſhould ſee occaſion. To theſe reſolutions only one perſon diſagreed. On the following day, about twenty other miniſters met at the Library, and expreſſed to the chairman of the committee their approbation of, and concurrence with the deſign; nor do I recollect that the original vote hath been impugned at any ſubſequent aſſembly, by the few who have appeared the moſt diſſatisfied with the conduct of the committee. The approved miniſters of the three denominations, in and about London, are ninety-five. Beſides thoſe who concurred from the beginning in the application to Parliament, there were others who appeared on the ſame ſide of the queſtion at ſucceeding meetings; and

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ſeveral, who by age, illneſs, or various circumſtances, were prevented from attending at all, have given undoubted proofs of their hearty aſſent to the ſcheme. It happened, indeed, that, during the proſecution of the affair, a ſmall number objected to the management of the committee. One gentleman diſliked the having of any Declaration at all, as being an improper conceſſion to the ſtate in matters of religion. Others were diſpleaſed that the Declaration precluded an open profeſſion before the civil magiſtrate of their firm belief of the doctrinal articles of the Church of England; nor did they approve of the Teſtimonial required by the bill, apprehending it might be converted to the prejudice of ſome worthy men of the Methodiſtical ſtamp, who, though not regularly admitted among us, might deſire to qualify under the character of Diſſenting Miniſters; an apprehenſion which, to me, appears not to have the leaſt foundation. Be that as it may, it is certain that, on no account, in no queſtion whatever, were there more hands held up than ſix in the way of oppoſition;

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an union this, which, I believe, hath not been found in any other meaſure of ſo public a nature; to which may be added, that there is not a ſingle perſon in the body, who profeſſes to wiſh that his brethren, who lie under difficulties with regard to the Toleration Act, may be left ſubject to its penalties.

This great unanimity is by no means confined to the Diſſenting Clergy in or near the city of London. The juſt and important reaſons which determined the Miniſters of the metropolis and of the places adjacent, to take up the matter ſomewhat ſuddenly, and late in the ſeſſion of Parliament, prevented that univerſal application to their brethren in the country, which was originally intended; but the members of the committee, and other perſons, had an opportunity of applying to a conſiderable number of them in different parts of the kingdom, and received, in return, their entire approbation and hearty encouragement. Many of their letters might be produced to this purpoſe; and it appeared by ſtriking facts how zealous they

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were in the cauſe. The moſt agreeable proofs have ſince been tranſmitted of their uniting with us in the ſame wiſhes, and of their having the ſame ſentiments with regard to the propriety of an application for the removal of Subſcription. Should, therefore, a ſecond application to Parliament be thought adviſeable, it will be fully ſeen how univerſally the Diſſenting Miniſters in England and Wales are ſolicitous for an enlargement of the Toleration Act, and how entirely they approve of proper meaſures being taken to effect ſo deſirable and important an object. The laity have manifeſted, likewiſe, their zeal in the cauſe, though immediately intereſted in that part alone of the late bill, which was intended to provide for the free education of their children, and which, indeed, is a matter of great importance to the whole body of Nonconformiſts.

But were it a fact, that only a minority of the Diſſenting Miniſters had ſolicited relief in the matter of Subſcription, this ought not to have been an hindrance to their ſucceſs. Their cauſe reſts on its own

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reaſonableneſs and equity, independent of numbers. The grievance is perſonal, and therefore every ſingle man hath a right to ſeek redreſs. He hath a title too, on the principles of juſtice and ſound policy, to be heard, and attended to, in his petition. The arguments in favour of a liberal Toleration apply to all, however few, who cannot conſcientiouſly ſubſcribe Teſts of human compoſition,

With regard to the very ſmall number of Miniſters who were unfriendly to their brethren in the late affair, and endeavoured to obſtruct the ſolicited relief, let me be permitted to give them a hint for the regulation of their future conduct. It behoves them to take care, that they do not inadvertently injure themſelves. The time is probably approaching when the Thirty-nine Articles will be reviſed and altered. A ſcheme of this kind is in agitation among the governors of the church; and ſhould it be carried into execution, there can be little doubt but that ſtrict Calviniſm will be excluded, and an Arminian turn be given to the eſtabliſhed doctrines.

trines. In that caſe, a number of Diſſenting Miniſters, who are zealous Calviniſts, may labour under ſimilar difficulties with thoſe who now object to particular parts of the preſent Articles. They may be obliged by law to ſubſcribe opinions which they apprehend to be contrary to the truth of the Goſpel, and, in order to obtain relief, may wiſh for the aſſiſtance of their brethren who are in different ſentiments. Nor need they be afraid of a retaliation; for all poſſible aid will, I doubt not, be granted them, upon the great principles which unite the whole body of the Diſſenters*.

* Should the projected Reformation of the Church of England be carried into execution, among other difficulties attending the undertaking, one will undoubtedly be, how to ſettle the laws with reſpect to Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters. Muſt they accommodate their conſciences to the fluctuations of the public opinion, and be obliged to ſubſcribe Articles different from, perhaps contrary to thoſe impoſed upon them before? or will they be entirely freed from the burden of human impoſitions? I hope that it will not be found ſo eaſy to enact new penal ſtatutes in matters of religion, as it hath been to retain the old ones.

It is in vain, however, to attempt the removal of particular objections to the extenſion of the Toleration Act, ſince we are told, that the "nature and deſign of civil "ſociety are clearly AGAINST us."

In anſwer to this bold and groundleſs poſition, it is ſufficient to aſſert, that the nature and deſign of civil ſociety are clearly FOR us: but if any clergyman be diſpoſed to reſt the cauſe on a fair, full, and diſtinct diſcuſſion of the point, ſome or other of my brethren will, I doubt not, undertake it with pleaſure. Indeed, the farther conſideration of the queſtion is needleſs, becauſe it hath already been determined in the immortal writings of Locke, Hoadly, and other friends to civil and religious liberty. It is the intention of every juſt and well formed ſyſtem of government to protect its ſubjects in the exerciſe of their moſt ſacred rights, among which the right of worſhipping God according to the dictates of conſcience, is eſſential and unalienable. To ſay, therefore, that the nature and deſign of civil ſociety are clearly againſt repealing the pe-

penalties of the Toleration Act, if it be ſaid with ſincerity, can only be the reſult of uncommon ignorance.

In ſupport of a doctrine ſo contrary to every principle of reaſon, religion, and ſound policy, it is alledged that "the "ſtate hath an undoubted right to control "overt acts, and that preaching is an overt "act of ſome importance to the ſtate." But has the meaning of an overt act been attended to in this aſſertion? According to the idea here given of it, it might be extended to almoſt every circumſtance in human life. The tranſactions of individuals in their neareſt and deareſt private concerns, in the management of their affairs, the regulation of their families, the education of their children, and a thouſand particulars beſides, may be conſidered, in their tendencies and effects, as important to the community. But are theſe things to be controlled by penal laws? In that caſe, perſonal and domeſtic liberty and happineſs, on which public felicity is founded, would be totally deſtroyed, and, by conſequence, every thing which ren-

ders our preſent exiſtence valuable and delightful.

The true and proper notion of an overt act is an act done with a malicious intention, an act criminally injurious to the public, and which can be proved to be ſuch by juſt and legal evidence. This I apprehend is the ſenſe of the word, as it occurs in law-books, and as it is uſed in judicial proceedings. In this ſenſe of the word, the civil magiſtrate hath not only an undoubted authority, but it is a prime part of his buſineſs, to control overt acts; and here may be drawn the line of Toleration. Whatever religious principles any man may pretend to, whatever pleas of conſcience may be urged by him, if he hurts his neighbour in perſon or property, if he diſturbs his fellow-creatures in the exerciſe of their rights and privileges, he ought to be reſtrained and puniſhed. This is the preciſe point at which it becomes the duty of the ſtate to interfere; and if the ſtate ſhould interfere ſooner, and extend its juriſdiction to the tendencies of opinions, it will be impoſ-

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ſible to know where to ſtop. Speculations and fancies about the tendencies of opinions might be carried on to the entire deſtruction of Toleration, and the vindication of every ſpecies of perſecution and tyranny. An over-zealous Arminian will be ready to contend, that ſeveral doctrines are contained even in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, which are calculated to have a bad effect on the morals and happineſs of mankind. An over-zealous Calviniſt will as warmly plead, that the power aſcribed to man by ſome divines, and other tenets held by them, are extremely prejudicial to the intereſts of holineſs. Things of this kind are too apt to be thrown out on both ſides, which have a ſtronger tincture of paſſion than of reaſon. Accuſations of the like ſort might be produced againſt a variety of religious ſentiments, till, at length, not liberty only, but piety and charity, would be loſt in the conteſt. But I ſay the leſs on the ſubject, as my ingenious and valuable friend, Dr. Furneaux, who hath been particularly attacked upon it, will do ample juſtice

juſtice to himſelf and to the cauſe in which he is engaged.

I ſhall leave it to the ſame gentleman to vindicate himſelf and the Proteſtant Diſſenters, with regard to what is alleged againſt him and them, concerning the deſign of appointing biſhops in America. The charge of holding intolerant principles upon this head is unfair in the higheſt degree; for ſuch principles are diſclaimed and abhorred by the whole body of Proteſtant Diſſenters. With reſpect to the American Epiſcopalians, if they aſk for a biſhop as a religious officer, to ORDAIN, CONFIRM, and perform the other SPIRITUAL duties belonging to that character, they have a right to be indulged in their requeſt; and to deny that they have ſuch a right would be a departure from the fundamental Ideas of Toleration. Should it, therefore, be thought needful to ſend biſhops to the colonies, who ſhall have no power or prerogative, OF ANY KIND, that may be detrimental to their fellow Chriſtians, and who ſhall only be put on a fair and equal footing with every dif-

different ſect in matters of religion and conſcience, ſuch an inſtitution ought not to be oppoſed, and will not, I am perſuaded, be oppoſed by the Diſſenters in England. Neither ought it to be objected to barely on account of ſuſpicions, jealouſies, and ſurmiſes, that it may be converted to the prejudice of the liberty of others, provided a reaſonable ſecurity be given that this ſhall not be the caſe. If the ſcheme hath any view to the obtaining for the Church of England ſuch an aſcendency and dominion in America as ſhall be injurious to the privileges of the religious bodies of men already ſettled there, which I would by no means inſinuate, the affair may ſafely be left to be adjuſted between the government and the coloniſts themſelves. Let me, however, be permitted to add, that if the Americans have entertained groundleſs prejudices on the ſubject, the conduct of the Engliſh biſhops, with regard to the late bill, hath not been at all calculated to remove them.

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tion, it will be neceſſary briefly to conſider the MANNER in which it has been carried on, becauſe this, likewiſe, is pretended to be very improper and indefenſible. Indeed, if the object, on account of which we had recourſe to Legiſlature, was altogether unreaſonable, it is of little importance to enquire how it was conducted, ſince, in that caſe, no prudence or delicacy of behaviour ought to have been of any avail in our behalf. On the other hand, if our petition was, IN ITSELF, moſt juſtifiable and equitable, ſome little irregularities in the mode of urging it ought not to have been converted to its prejudice. But let us ſee what the impropriеties were which reflected ſuch a diſgrace on the MANNER of our application.

One accuſation is, that the committee PERSONALLY applied to members of Parliament in favour of the bill. It is true, that they did ſo, and they were fully juſtified in ſuch a conduct. They had a right to repreſent their caſe to the perſons who would condeſcend to hear it ; nor was there, by that means, an undue influence

ence exerted. The Diſſenting Miniſters did not directly ſolicit any member's vote: they did not attempt to move his paſſions, or to lay a reſtraint upon his conſcience. They only begged that noblemen and gentlemen would give their preſence in the Houſe, and their attention to the ſubject. They only requeſted a fair and candid hearing of their cauſe, and that the Peers and Repreſentatives of the People would act agreeably to what ſhould appear to be juſt and equitable, after ſuch a hearing of the queſtion before them. The committee were ready, likewiſe, to anſwer, as far as lay in their power, any queſtions which might be propoſed to them, or to remove any difficulties that might lie in the minds of the great and reſpectable men on whom they had the honour of waiting. All this might be done in almoſt every caſe, and it might reaſonably be done in our particular caſe. If, therefore, there was any impropriety in this part of our conduct, it is an impropriety which muſt be repeated on a future occaſion.

But we are told, that the Manner in which the Diſſenting Miniſters carried on

their application to Parliament was, in another reſpect, ſtill more ſtrikingly indefenſible: "Letters were ſent from perſons in "the country to their repreſentatives earneſtly requeſting their votes." How far votes were directly ſollicited I am not able to ſay, not having ſeen any letters of that kind; but, with regard to the having of recourſe to members of Parliament, and even aſking their ſupport of the bill, I ſhall not ſcruple to aſſert, that it is capable of an entire juſtification. Who are the gentlemen with whom the Diſſenters are uſually connected, and in whoſe favour they exert their influence at the time of an election? They are, undoubtedly, ſuch gentlemen as are underſtood to be the known and approved friends of civil and religious liberty. When, therefore, a queſtion aroſe of great importance to the rights of conſcience in general, and to the Nonconformiſts in particular, it was natural for Diſſenters, it was their duty, to apply to thoſe repreſentatives whom they believed to be friendly to their cauſe, and whoſe concurrence and aid they had a title to hope for and expect. It might otherwiſe

wiſe have been thought, that they did not wiſh for an extenſion of the Act of Toleration.

I will go farther, and ſay, that ſuch members of Parliament as refuſed their aſſiſtance to the late bill ought not to be encouraged by Diſſenters at any future election. The gentlemen who were averſe to our cauſe might be honeſt men, who acted under the direction of a miſguided conſcience. I have no doubt but that this was the caſe with regard to the moſt zealous of our adverſaries in the Houſe of Commons: but ſuch gentlemen muſt excuſe me in ſaying, that thoſe who will oppoſe the repeal of unjuſt and inhuman penal ſtatutes muſt be very improper and inſufficient guardians of the public liberty, and eſpecially of the liberties of the people who are affected by thoſe ſtatutes. For my own part, I have no heſitation in declaring, that I would not, on any account, give my vote for a repreſentative who hath refuſed to concur in improving the Toleration Act; and I think myſelf fully vindicable in this reſolution. A man of ſuch narrow principles can never be con-

ſidered, by genuine Diſſenters, as worthy to be entruſted with the protection of the privileges of a free nation. A friend to intolerance, if he be really ſuch from the dictates of his underſtanding, muſt be deſtitute of wiſdom; if he adopts the character from motives of intereſt or ambition, he muſt be deſtitute of integrity and humanity: and ſurely it muſt be juſtifiable to deny our encouragement to perſons who are deficient in ſuch important and eſſential qualifications for a ſeat in the Legiſlature, as wiſdom, integrity, and humanity.

In fact, the declamation about the impropriety of applying to members of Parliament is futile to the laſt degree. Such an application muſt be made, in caſes whether of a PARTIAL or a GENERAL good. It is honourable to plead in an honourable cauſe. The preſent courſe of the world requires a conduct of this kind, and the moſt equitable buſineſs cannot otherwiſe be tranſacted. With regard to the Diſſenting Committee, the liberty we took of perſonally waiting upon noblemen and gentlemen, was not at the hazard of

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our INGENUOUS CHARACTERS. It was peculiarly neceſſary, as our views and principles were not ſufficiently known. It was proper to explain them, becauſe they required only to be explained, in order to ſet the reaſonableneſs of our petition in a clear and ſtriking point of view. This, indeed, is the circumſtance which ſeems to have rendered our viſits to the members of Parliament particularly diſagreeable to the enemies of the bill.

HÆRET LATERI—ARUNDO.

But as the wound is ſo ſlight, as the ARUNDO is not LETHALIS, there is the leſs occaſion for ſo much offence being taken.

After all, was there no influence, no power exerted on the other ſide of the queſtion? Is it true, that the Diſſenting Miniſters had nothing to contend with but the ARGUMENTS WHICH MIGHT OCCUR AGAINST THEM? In this caſe, they would have thought themſelves engaged in a very favourable conteſt. Were not the Biſhops able to apply to all ranks of men with a weight which could not poſſibly be exerted on our part? Could they not, by the advantage of their eminent

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ſtation, have immediate recourſe to every temporal Lord? Have they not an eaſy acceſs to the higheſt perſonal authority in this kingdom? And did they really continue totally inactive, truſting ſolely to the goodneſs of their cauſe *? Did they not ſpeak to a ſingle Peer? Did they not go FARTHER? Was there no influence reaching upwards to the very SUMMIT OF POWER, and then deſcending with great force againſt us? Will any man lay his hand upon his heart, and ſay, that it was the mere rectitude of continuing the penal laws againſt the Nonconformiſts which brought down the whole weight of government upon us in the Houſe of Lords? It is true, that we are ſimple men, who are precluded, by our ſituation, from much knowledge of the world: but, ignorant as we are, this is one of the CREDENDA, which our faith will never be able to digeſt. An inhabitant of the ULTIMA

* Facts might here be mentioned; but the author purpoſely declines inſiſting upon them. Should the charge of having endeavoured to exert an undue influence be renewed againſt the Diſſenting Miniſters, the conduct of their opponents may perhaps hereafter, be more fully conſidered.

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THULE, if he had but an opportunity of perusing sometimes an English news-paper, would be incapable of believing, that a majority of British Peers, could, in the year 1772, be induced, by reason and argument ONLY, to display their zeal against the repealing of statutes which are a reproach to justice, to religion, and to humanity.

As the Protestant Dissenting Ministers have conducted themselves so imprudently in the late affair, they are advised to return quietly to their studies and ministerial labours. It is with pleasure that they engage in the more immediate business of their profession, and they wish to be drawn from it as little as possible. When, however, they are called out of the common line of duty by some great occasion, interesting to Christianity and mankind, they think themselves amply justified in stepping forth with alacrity into a wider field of action; but it is not their ambition to go farther out of their accustomed limits, or to continue longer in a situation which does not usually belong to them, than necessity and honour

may

may demand. Let them be indulged in their requeſt for legal ſecurity and protection, and they will thankfully retire to their private employments. They do not deſire to be troubleſome to men of rank, or to haunt the levees of the great. If they can obtain a Toleration which is ſettled on the ſolid baſis of law, and not held by the precarious tenure of connivance and compaſſion, they will have nothing more to aſk of the ſtate.

This may ſerve as an anſwer to thoſe perſons who imagine that the Diſſenting Clergy had aims beyond the objects of their late application to Parliament. It is not true, that they had any farther deſigns. Their ſole purpoſes were to be delivered from the burden of Subſcription, and to procure relief for Tutors and School-maſters; and they had not the moſt diſtant thoughts of applying hereafter for privileges and benefits of a different nature. The ſuppoſition that they were actuated by ambitious views, is grounded on an ignorance of their characters and intentions. They were animated by no regard to the honours and profits

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of the preſent world. Their ambition is to go on quietly and ſecurely in worſhipping God agreeably to the dictates of their conſciences; and if they can be ſerviceable, by their labours and their writings, to the cauſe of religion or of literature, it is the higheſt glory to which they aſpire.

The laſt inſtance of impropriety charged upon the Diſſenting Miniſters, is their CHOICE OF THE TIME IN WHICH THE APPLICATION TO PARLIAMENT WAS MADE. The TIME, however, is a conſideration that ought not to be attended to, when any thing is ſolicited which is a matter of right. In that caſe, redreſs ought, in duty, to be granted at the inſtant in which it is aſked. It never can be too ſoon to do what is always eſſentially right and fit to be done. It never can be an improper ſeaſon for expunging penal laws from the ſtatute book which are a diſgrace to legiſlature and to humanity. The only real objection that can be urged againſt the Time of the late application is, that it was not made before; that laws have been ſo long acquieſced in which are unjuſt and barbarous, and the repeal of

which ought to have taken place from the earlieſt period wherein it was ſeen that the execution of them was contrary to every principle worthy of men or of Chriſtians.

But it is ſaid, that the Church had already been attacked by the Clergy's Petition, by the Nullum Tempus Bill, and by the Quaker's Bill. Were we to admit that theſe things were unjuſtifiable attacks upon the national eſtabliſhment of religion, (and how far they were ſo I am not capable of judging in the two laſt caſes, as not having attended to them) what connection have they with the affair of the Diſſenters? The requeſt of the Diſſenting Miniſters was, in no view, an act of hoſtility againſt the Church of England. She had, properly ſpeaking, no concern in the queſtion, nor could ſhe be injured by its being determined in their favour. Was it an attack upon the Church of England, to endeavour to free the Britiſh conſtitution of government from intolerant laws and a perſecuting ſpirit? Was it an attack upon the Church of England, to ſolicit the removal

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of penalties which ſhe HERSELF owns cannot be carried into execution? The very ſuppoſition is the ſevereſt reflection upon her that her moſt inveterate enemies could ſuggeſt. Had the Biſhops been fortunate enough to have ſeen the Diſſenting Clergy's application in a favourable light, they might have had the glory of giving a reputation to the religious eſtabliſhment of this kingdom which hath never been obtained by any religious eſtabliſhment in Chriſtendom. They might have wiped off the reproach of having it aſſerted, that Toleration is more perfect, and ſcriptural Chriſtianity upon a better footing in Turky than in any other country of Europe. They might have had the power of appealing to their enemies, and of ſaying, that the Church of England had diſcovered ſuch a deciſive mark of her being the true church of our bleſſed Saviour, as no Chriſtian, no Proteſtant nation beſides could afford. It would have been, as a great * prelate hath expreſſed it, THE SEAL OF THE LIVING GOD UPON HER.

* Dr. Warburton.

With regard to the Time in general of applying to Parliament for an enlargement of the Toleration Act, what could be a more proper one than the preſent? Are we likely to have hereafter a more juſt and more gracious Prince? Are we likely to find a milder and more liberal bench of Prelates? Are we likely to meet with a period, which, upon the whole, will be leſs favourable to perſecution? Certainly, ſuch a ſtate of things was the very ſeaſon in which the Diſſenting Miniſters might hope and expect to obtain a compliance with their very reaſonable petition. It would be too late for them to aſk relief, ſhould evil days approach, and government become unequitable and ungenerous. They gave the beſt proof of their good opinion of, and of their good diſpoſition to, the ſtate, by making their application at this particular juncture; and, whatever narrow politicians may think, the admiſſion of their claim would have been honourable and advantageous to the public.

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The Impropriety of the Time is the common topic of ſtateſmen and of churchmen, when they are unwilling to grant a reaſonable requeſt: but it is unworthy of being mentioned by an ingenuous mind, eſpecially when the requeſt is founded on the great principles of truth and humanity. A topic it is, which hath ſo often been inſiſted upon, that it is become diſgraceful, and carries with it an idea of contempt and ridicule.

But after all the inſinuations thrown out againſt the Diſſenting Miniſters; after all the objections to the MATTER, the MANNER, and the TIME of their late application; after all the ſuggeſtions of their diſbelief of fundamental doctrines; after all the invidious hints at the dangerous principles ſuppoſed to be held by them, it is acknowledged that they are very worthy men; and ſome of them, it is ſaid, if they were conformiſts to the eſtabliſhed church, would ADORN ANY STATION WHICH MIGHT FALL TO THEIR LOT. They cannot but be flattered, that ſo favourable an opinion ſhould at laſt be en-

entertained of them: nor are they ſo inſenſible of the advantages of life, as not to think it deſirable to partake of the emoluments of the national form of worſhip, provided they could do it conſiſtently with the preſervation of a good conſcience. But they muſt be permitted to ſay, that the Church hath not taken the proper method of inviting them to enter into her communion. They are perſuaded, with the eminent biſhop Warburton, that no religious eſtabliſhment can be vindicated, but upon the footing of its being connected with an equal and an extenſive Toleration; and while the religious eſtabliſhment of this country continues averſe to ſuch a Toleration, they are obliged, in honour and duty, to remain ſeparated from it. So long as the Church of England retains the very eſſence of Popery, by contending for the ſubſiſtence of penal laws, in matters that relate only to conſcience, and the intereſts of another world; they imagine that they hear the voice of God ſpeaking to them in his word, "Come out of her, my people." Whereas, if ſhe were willing

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to grant a free indulgence to all who differ from her, many Diſſenting Miniſters would be better diſpoſed to unite with her, when certain alterations are made in the terms of her admiſſion, and in the modes and forms of her diſcipline and worſhip.

The determined oppoſition of the Biſhops to the requeſt of the Proteſtant Diſſenting Clergy might afford room for many obſervations. The ſubject is capable of being conſidered in a variety of reſpects, which would not, perhaps, exhibit the conduct of their Lordſhips in ſo favourable a light as a candid and liberal mind might wiſh to put it in; but I have no inclination to enlarge upon a diſagreeable and invidious topic. Whatever may be my ſentiments with regard to the part they acted in the late affair, I am not inſenſible that, in general, they are men of decent and amiable characters, and of ſoft and gentle manners. Some of them are eminent for their talents in buſineſs: others of them are diſtinguiſhed ornaments of the republic of literature, and have done ſignal ſervice to the cauſe of Chriſtianity.

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I recollect that a Pearce, a Warburton, a Lowth, a Law, a Newton, and a Moſs, have a ſeat on the Epiſcopal Bench; and I wiſh that all who belong to that bench may obtain a reputation that ſhall be fixed on the moſt ſolid baſis. Should, therefore, a ſecond application be made to Parliament, I hope that the venerable body of Prelates will candidly and fully reconſider the matter. I hope that they will reconſider it, not according to the principles of a narrow and miſtaken policy, but in the grand points of view which alone are worthy of their attention and their character. The queſtions with them ought to be, and, I truſt, will be, what are the dictates of true Chriſtianity on the ſubject; what are the demands of a juſt and equitable Toleration; and what are the directions of that ſound wiſdom "which "is from above, which looks not at the "things which are ſeen and temporal, but "at the things which are unſeen and eter-"nal;" their Lordſhips, I flatter myſelf, will keep in mind the admirable words of the earl of Chatham, that, "in this free

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" country, twenty benches of Biſhops " ought not to ſet law and humanity at " variance." They will remember, I am perſuaded, that, in order to ſhew their real liberality of ſentiment, and their real averſion to perſecution, it is not ſufficient for us to be told, as we often are, that they are mild and tolerant in their ſpirit and temper; for our Saviour hath left another criterion from which to judge of the diſpoſitions of men, when he ſaith, " By " their fruits ye ſhall know them." The Biſhops have not only a political, but a CHRISTIAN character to maintain; and the CHRISTIAN character is infinitely the moſt important. The Chriſtian character alone it is which will be of any avail, when all human ſplendors ſhall ceaſe; when the humble Nonconformiſt teacher and the exalted prelate will be no otherwiſe diſtinguiſhed, than as they diſtinguiſhed themſelves upon earth, by their conſcientious adherence to truth and integrity.

Though the Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſters have been unſucceſsful in their en-

deavours to obtain a juſt enlargement of Chriſtian Toleration, they have no reaſon to look back upon their conduct with diſapprobation or regret. On the contrary, they have cauſe for rejoicing in the part they have acted. They have diſcharged that duty which they owed to themſelves, to their people, and poſterity. They have entered their public proteſt againſt laws which are injurious to their juſt rights, as men and as Chriſtians. They have obtained the verdict of the Britiſh Houſe of Commons in their favour. They have had the concurrence and ſupport of the moſt honourable and illuſtrious characters in this country; and the general voice of the public hath approved of their proceedings. Their upright principles and views have been better known than they ever were before; and, with regard to the Diſſenting intereſt in particular, which they believe to be the intereſt of ſcriptural Chriſtianity, it hath, perhaps, been more promoted by the denial, than it would have been by the grant of their petition. Perhaps, it has fared no worſe with Chriſtianity,

tianity, that ſhe has always had the ſecular arm againſt her, as it is at this day; and that ſhe has never yet been, I ſay not eſtabliſhed, but even legally tolerated, in any country of Chriſtendom.

The providence of God does not always accompliſh its ends in the manner which may ſeem the moſt deſirable to weak and fallible men. The oppoſition that is made to the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs is often the very circumſtance which renders it, in the final reſult of things, more illuſtriouſly conſpicuous, and more completely victorious. Were ſlight conceſſions made as ſoon as aſked, mankind would much longer be contented with a partial and defective reformation. But that timid and ſiniſter policy, which ſets itſelf againſt the ſmalleſt degree of alteration and improvement, defeats its own purpoſes. It occaſions the ſpirit of enquiry to be puſhed much farther than was originally intended. This ſpirit gains ſtrength by reſiſtance, till, at length, it breaks through the barriers erected againſt it by bigotry, intolerance, and worldly cunning. The period will come,

come, in which penal ſtatutes, in matters that belong to conſcience and to God, will be diſmiſſed with univerſal abhorrence: and when BIOGRAPHY ſhall relate, in future ages, the eminent virtues and the learned labours of ſome of the preſent bench of Biſhops, ſhe will, at the ſame time, be obliged to record it with ſhame, as an aſtoniſhing blot in their characters, that they were capable of pleading for the continuance of laws, which are repugnant to every dictate of wiſdom, every precept of the Goſpel, and every ſentiment of humanity.

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